THE 3 PILLARS OF SELF-MASTERY

DELLA WREN

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The 3 Pillars of Self-Mastery

> Learn to master yourself within the experience, without needing to change, control, or manipulate the experience. ~Della Wren

Training the Mind to Work With You

You are not your experience — the thoughts you think, the feelings you feel, or the behaviours you show others. You are a soul, a spirit, an eternal being who has chosen to take on a human form temporarily. This human form is the vehicle you use to explore this planet we call Earth.

The human form has a way of making us forget about our souls, our higher selves, our spirits, and our eternal nature. Our perception is limited to what we can see, touch, feel, learn, and understand from

the world around us. Because of this limited view, we live life as a series of separate experiences and random events.

We create our understanding of the world based on what we're taught, what we perceive, and what we learn through living. This understanding shapes who we are, who we become, the choices we make, the relationships we form, the roles we play, and the paths we take.

Life is not a straight line. The past, present, and future don't unfold as neat, consecutive events. They zigzag, detour, loop back, and veer off course. The linear order we see is a limitation of perception — one that helps our minds manage reality but challenges us to understand how every experience connects to the next.

This limitation can make control feel impossible, experience feel chaotic, and stability feel out of reach.

We are the common denominator in our own lives. We are present in every experience we have; we cannot remove ourselves from our own story. Yet from a young age, we're taught that others have more influence over us than our true selves do. This shifts our sense of identity and control outward, stripping us of our internal power.

Without that power, we're left navigating life with little more than hope that things will just work out — without us having to do much.

Self-mastery changes this. It is the recognition of our internal power, our quiet control over how we respond within the experience.

Our parents, teachers, and caregivers were partly right — they knew we couldn't control the outside world. But they didn't realize that life isn't about controlling what's outside; it's about managing ourselves inside the experience.

If we are the common denominator, then how we respond is where our true influence lies. It comes not from demanding control over what we can't control, but from choosing how we show up.

From this understanding, we begin a journey through our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.

This isn't a journey toward perfection. As human beings, we are perfectly imperfect. We aren't here to be anything other than our human selves — but that doesn't mean we can't make the journey a little easier.

Self-mastery is about smoothing out the bumps.

We start with the human mind and our thoughts. What do we think? Why do we think it? Where do our thoughts come from? And what can we do with them? These questions have been the subject of countless spiritual and philosophical discussions.

Spirituality often says our thoughts are like clouds — we should just watch them pass by. It's a beautiful image, but it can imply that we have no control over our minds, encouraging dissociation from the human experience.

But if I can't manage my thinking, how can I manage anything else inside myself?

Buddhist philosophy suggests there is no fixed self at all, that the goal is to realize emptiness within us. This too creates a sense of disconnection from the body and mind — one could even say it makes physical death the goal.

If I came here just to wait to die, why did I come at all?

My philosophy accepts the imperfect nature of the human form, while recognizing that we can work within those limits to create a life worth living.

Life is a balance of joy and pain, love and hate, happiness and sadness, good and bad. It is all those things, everything in between, and so much more.

When we accept that we can work toward mastering ourselves within all of that, it gives us purpose, meaning, and passion — things that get lost when we're just waiting to die while dissociating from our human selves.

The desire to avoid pain — the anger, sadness, grief, shame, guilt, blame — is what gave birth to many spiritual philosophies. We think, This can't be what life is meant to be. It must be a mistake.

But this is why managing our thoughts matters: it's how we manage what we do with the pain inside us.

When we learn to manage our thoughts and feelings about pain, we stop running from the parts of life we don't like. When we no longer need to avoid pain, we can finally live fully, unafraid of what's next.

How do we manage the chaos inside our minds?

First, notice the thoughts that run on repeat — the "low-hanging fruit." These stories are easy to spot and give us chances to practice redirecting our attention when our minds spiral.

Your mind is not you. It's a muscle — like your calf — and it needs training if you want it to work with you, not against you. If you were training for a marathon or learning a sport, you wouldn't expect perfection right away. You'd show up, practice, and build strength over time.

Training your mind works the same way. Repetitive thoughts actually make great practice material because they're always right there, ready for you.

The mind also needs boundaries. Left unchecked, it acts like a toddler — grabbing for what it can't have. Your job as the observer of

your mind (remember the spiritual clouds?) is to remind it: you only need to know what you know — and that's enough.

You don't have to let your mind replay old stories or invent new problems. That's just habit, and you can unlearn it.

Once you start managing these thought patterns, you'll probably notice just how ridiculous your mind can get. It throws everything it can to keep your attention — some of it so wild you'll have to laugh. Honestly, it's better if you do. Bring your sense of humour — you're going to need it.

Is the thought true?

Invented meanings, interpretations, and reasons why things happen often create more pain than the experience itself. We create extra suffering by assuming what wasn't said, meant, or done.

Slowing the mind down — or at least recognizing what it's doing — helps us manage the experience within ourselves.

You can work with this in a couple of ways: either shut the mind down when it starts spinning stories, or let it go but treat the detour as entertainment — something you don't have to believe.

Neither way is better or worse; it's what works for you. Either way, tossing out made-up stories frees you to heal and move on faster.

Part of this is accepting the limits of your perception. You only know what was said — not why, not what it meant, not what was left unsaid, and not how it felt to the other person.

Injecting meaning into the unknown only creates confusion and pain. You don't have to let your mind guess or assume.

Learn to let the experience be just what it is — a thing that happened without trying to control or change it.

From that place, managing yourself becomes easier. When you stop inventing or inferring, you drop the story and return your focus to yourself — your own thoughts and feelings.

Emotional Regulation

How do we manage our feelings?

Outside of life-or-death moments, most feelings come paired with a thought. We may not always be conscious of the thought, but if we're aware of the feeling, we can uncover the thought behind it.

Feelings validate thoughts, and thoughts validate feelings.

If we're angry and want to blame someone, those feelings give the mind an excuse to spin a story of blame — whether or not the facts support it.

This validation strengthens feelings and turns them into a snowball, growing as the cycle repeats.

The feelings make the mind's story feel true and real. At this point, the mind can tell you whatever it wants, and you'll probably believe it because you're caught in the feelings.

Feelings become a distraction, pulling you away from creating space between you and your experience. They take you on their own journey — more colorful, imaginative, and entertaining than anything the mind could create alone.

Feelings add pizzazz to the mind's story, like turning a black-and-white photo into full color.

The colors shift your focus and change the meaning of the picture.

Whatever made you mad becomes the focus of your thoughts — whether it actually happened or the mind invented it.

How do we maintain our focus?

When feelings get overwhelming, the best thing is to feel.

All the logic, spirituality, and philosophy in the world can't replace a good cry.

It's okay to feel.

When a feeling arises, allow yourself to feel it fully. Stay with it.

As much as you want to distract yourself, push it away, or make it stop, try not to.

Feelings pass.

Let them.

Feel fully, and you'll feel lighter — as if something holding you down has loosened. That's emotion dissipating and you becoming present again.

After feeling, ask yourself: what was the thought behind this? What did I make it mean? How did I interpret the experience? What's the story?

You'll notice a shift in your interpretation.

You might see things clearer, maybe even find some humor.

And that's where self-mastery happens — between your thoughts and feelings.

In that space, you get to choose.

You decide what story you tell yourself.

You decide what your experience means.

You decide who you are and who you're becoming.

That is mastery.

Are feelings a choice?

Feelings become a choice when we talk about emotional timing. My need to express the emotion can vary depending on the situation. When I'm sitting on my couch working on my thinking, sometimes a thought will bring an emotion with it. There are times when that emotion demands to come out regardless of what I want, and that's okay. There are other times when I can continue to question my thinking without needing to feel the emotion so much. The emotion will often fade before I get back to it.

Healing happens either way because I don't allow the emotion to become a shiny object or a rabbit hole. The emotion is self-contained—it's a thing in itself. It's not the whole story. It just accompanied the thought. The emotion is not more important than the thought; it's actually secondary.

Emotion amplifies the value of the thought while simultaneously distracting you from it. The distraction is learned behaviour. If we can learn to accept the presence of the emotion without getting distracted by it, then we can heal. We learn to focus on the mental reason for the emotion, not the emotion itself.

We don't need to focus on what happened externally—it doesn't matter, and we can't change it. The reason you feel bad is not because somebody called you stupid. The reason you feel bad is because of what was triggered within you when they said that. Your job is to focus on the mental trigger, not the emotional reaction. You heal by changing your thinking about what was said, not by crying out your feelings.

What does my thinking need to change into?

Our job is to focus on accepting the presence of pain in the other person. When somebody calls you names, they are projecting their own pain. That pain is not yours; it belongs to them. You don't have to pick it up or take it on. You do not have to be hurt by another person's pain, regardless of how they choose to express it.

Remember, emotions get attention. When people call each other names, it's because they are using their emotions to get attention. You can choose not to pay attention. You can choose not to defend yourself and not to emotionally react in the moment. You don't have to honour their request for attention just because they demand attention through pain.

You have a choice to offer compassion instead of your own hurt feelings. Taking their bait engages you in an argument. Do you really want or need to have that argument? It's a choice. The feeling of being hurt and then expressing that through self-defense is a choice related to emotional timing. The choice will be based on environment, circumstances, and self-awareness. Do I need to do this right now? Not every insult requires a response, just like not every movie is going to make you cry. There is no wrong answer. Both options are going to offer you learning opportunities. If you focus on what the experience triggered within you or what you got out of it, the learning will be far more powerful than if you simply focus on how to get that person to stop calling you names.

Once my thoughts and feelings are managed, how do I change my behaviour?

Responding With Awareness

Mindfulness. It's a form of self-awareness where we pay attention to our thoughts and feelings so that we can figure out how to act. It's part of self-mastery in the sense that it offers us a choice about how to engage in every situation. We are not tied into rigid, obligated responses. We can tune into ourselves and make conscious choices about what we want based on how we feel and what we think. It's not about getting it right every time. We're not perfect, and we're not going to get it right every time. It's about acknowledging our humanness and allowing that to be part of the experience.

Mindfulness is not meditation or prayer, although those things can be helpful for some people. It's about recognizing how your thoughts and feelings are influencing your behaviour. If you're mad, does that immediately make you start yelling at everybody? Or do you have

the ability to manage that? Your feeling of anger can influence your behaviour or not. What you do with the anger is entirely up to you. Mindfulness and self-mastery both offer you the power to put a pause in there so that you can make a conscious choice.

The behaviour you choose might take the form of walking away for a while, keeping quiet, or offering the other person an entirely different option. When we make these choices, we aren't making them from our own pain. It's not people-pleasing or permission-seeking. It's an empowered choice to consciously choose a response to a given scenario.

For a while, you're only going to see this after the fact. You'll sit down with yourself after the experience and you'll realize you reacted badly. You'll realize you messed up. Your job is not to beat yourself up. You're human, and that's completely okay. When you realize what you "should" have done in that moment, you have to give yourself permission to accept your own imperfection. From the space of acceptance, you're going to make a choice to apologize to the other person and to offer a different response.

Mindfulness includes conscious, non-judgmental acceptance of ourselves and others. That's hard to do. We're taught that we're obligated to react, that feelings get attention, and that thoughts are weak. If thoughts are weak, then mindfulness is also a weakness. When we're taking time to mentally reflect instead of emotionally reflect, we're building our own internal power. We're building the mental muscle that becomes personal sovereignty. We're giving ourselves freedom from societal rules, cycles, and learned behaviours.

When your behaviour is solely tied to how you feel, you're at the mercy of your emotions. If you tend to stuff your emotions, you might look calm on the outside—even when you're not. But if you're somebody that can't hold back, then you likely appear to be emotionally

volatile to the people around you. Where you appear on this spectrum has a lot to do with how you were taught (or not) to deal with your emotions. Do you naturally use emotion to get attention? Do you fade into the woodwork by keeping your emotions under wraps?

Self-understanding plays a role in how you approach mindfulness and self-mastery. I stuffed my emotions because I was a permission-seeking people-pleaser. It wasn't my emotions that dictated my behaviour—it was what I thought other people wanted. If you don't know these things about yourself yet, it's time to sit down and understand yourself. Mental clarity makes a difference in how you decide to approach tools like mindfulness and self-mastery. It's hard to heal things you're not aware of. It's even harder to choose whether you want to continue these patterns or not if you don't know they exist.

I'll be honest with you, simply knowing that you're a permission-seeking people-pleaser like I was is only part of the story. You still have to figure out how that looks for you. What triggers it? Which relationships in your life bring it out the most? You have to heal the internal pain—and then figure out how to show up differently. It's not a straight line. There will be many detours, problems, questions, and struggles. The key is to keep going. Don't beat yourself up [[Article about beating the self up.]] for not getting it right the first 10 times you try it, because you know what? You probably won't. Let that be okay. Let your learning curve be messy and real. It's a marathon, not a sprint. I know that's cliché, but it's just the truth of the journey.

As you begin to show up differently, the people around you may or may not change with you. Here's the hard part—you have to be okay with that. We gave ourselves permission to change, but that doesn't mean we try to make others change with us. Learning to leave people where they are is a hard, but necessary part of this process. If grief

shows up here, allow it. You may spend some time mourning the loss of the relationships you had as you begin forming new relationships with the same people. Trust that as you respond to people differently, they will change how they treat you over time. You can't make them change. Be kind and compassionate instead of demanding. It might take a long time, but if you're patient, you'll start to see a difference in the people around you.

As you separate your behaviour from how you feel, it may feel like a disconnection. When you're in the habit of acting on your emotions all the time, suddenly not doing that will feel like you're not honoring yourself. It's not that we're not honoring our feelings, we're just creating a new strategy for how to deal with them.

What is the new strategy for dealing with our emotions?

Ultimately, we want to learn to communicate emotion without acting out emotion. It's the difference between telling people you're mad and screaming at them at the top of your lungs. It's okay to be mad. It's okay to tell people you're mad at them. Save the screaming for when you're alone with your pillow. Essentially, we're teaching ourselves emotional regulation through a lens of mindfulness and consciousness.

At first, this might feel fake. We're used to using our emotions to get attention. The first few times we hold ourselves back from letting our emotions loose, it's going to feel like we're not being true to ourselves. It's a story that other people might tell you because they want you to keep acting the way you used to.

In truth, having our emotions on full blast all the time is really dysfunctional behaviour. It sets us up for chaos. It overrides communication. It denies others the clarity they deserve. People deserve to know why we feel the way we feel, so that if they have a desire to help, they know how to do that. Screaming the clarity at them will

probably get missed. If you tell them you're mad but never calmly explain why—because you're too busy screaming—they can't really help you. They can't resolve the problem.

The strategy for dealing with the emotion is the same one we'd use to kick a habit. We don't actually need to label behaviour as "good" or "bad." What we need is to recognize what's working and what's not. Much like a habit, we repeat what feels safe, familiar, or effective. But when it starts to cost us clarity, peace, or connection, it's worth looking at.

It's not about becoming a better person. It's about becoming a more conscious one. You're not trying to be good, or nice, or emotionally perfect. You're just trying to become aware of how you're showing up—and decide if that's still aligned with who you want to be.

Because our behaviour is heavily influenced by how we feel, we need to understand where the emotion came from and allow it to release naturally without using it as a weapon against other people. This is why it's so important to spend time with yourself every day, reflecting on how and why you showed up the way you did in certain interactions. You're not going to do this every time you talk to a cashier at a grocery store. You're going to do this for interactions that are important to you, that end badly, or just didn't end the way you wanted them to.

You can't take responsibility for other people's behaviour. We never really know why other people do what they do. We're not here to waste time trying to figure that out. Our goal is to understand why we do what we do and then spend the time to figure that out. When we have mental clarity, we can make logical choices about what to change, how to change it, and why we need to change it.

My daily practice never included meditation. I'm a writer, so I wrote all the time, but I wouldn't call it "journaling" because very often my journal was a public blog. I shared my whole healing journey on the Internet. That said, I did have a daily practice where I sat with myself to understand how I showed up in the world. In truth, it became a full-time job for me. I was in it neck deep. For a while, I spent 8 to 10 hours a day understanding myself—not because I thought that's what healing was supposed to look like, but because I needed it. I was untangling years of patterns, beliefs, and survival strategies. It was intense.

That doesn't mean it has to look like that for you. The point is to make it consistent. Whether it's ten minutes or ten hours, what matters most is that you choose to understand yourself. It's not about how much time you spend doing this—it's only about making the choice to do it.

I used tarot cards as a middleman between my ego and my intuition. I spent my time using those cards to change how I saw what was happening and what other people were doing. Over time, I began to change how I showed up in those situations.

When I first started to change my behaviour, fear came to the surface. I was terrified—petrified of what people would think of me. Would they still like me?

I was a people-pleaser. So of course changing my behaviour triggered a ton of fear. But it also gave me something valuable: it taught me how to manage fear. Fear became my constant companion. It hung out in the background and listed off all the reasons why I shouldn't heal myself, why I shouldn't change. Every time it did that, I'd sit down with my tarot cards to understand why the fear was so loud—why it insisted I shouldn't change—while also understanding why it was so

important that I did. I reminded myself of why I was doing the work, what I wanted to feel, and what I wanted to become.

Eventually, I made a choice:

"It's not a matter of if I'll do the thing. It's only a question of how long it will take me to get there."

I gave myself permission to sit with the fear, spend time understanding that fear, and then shift my thinking around what I was doing—so I could feel the fear and do it anyway. Fear became a guide, showing me what within myself needed work. It wasn't an external compass, it was an internal one—pointing to challenges I had created within myself.

Contact The Author

You can find more of my writing below.

The Stillhouse: https://thestillhouse.space

Blog: https://dellawren.com